

The Landing

As the secret convoy sneaked into the Mediterranean, Berlin Sally broadcast over the radio welcoming the 100th Infantry Division to the War zone. The German intelligence section had again received a military secret.

The ships pulled into the Marseilles harbor on 20 October 1944 and then we waited and waited. We didn't know whether to be happy or sorry that we were once again in a harbor. We were ready to disembark and the night was getting darker when all of a sudden a dense fog formed around us. German planes were trying to welcome us, but man-made fog hid the harbor and us. We did not suffer any strafing or bombing attacks and Adolf's planes returned home.

Later we disembarked the *USAT George Washington* by climbing down cargo nets, which were draped over the side, and onto a small landing craft that took us to shore. There we waited for further orders. We finally picked up our personal gear and marched through the city of Marseilles, France, to about ten miles north in the middle of the night. The streets were made of cobblestones and it seemed then that all of the "rues" (streets) were going uphill. Finally we arrived at our training area, but for how long we didn't know.

We hoped it would be for a long time as none of the men were anxious to get into battle. What we saw at that point was a filthy, dirty place, but civilization once again sure did look good. We pitched our pup tents and began to get our equipment inside the little canvas covers as it was beginning to rain and the mud was already ankle deep in the area. What a first impression to get of overseas life, but this was heaven compared to what it would be later. The next day we were told that some of the men could receive passes

COMPANY L GOES TO WAR

7

to go into Marseilles. We could hardly wait to spend some of those francs that we had converted from American dollars on board ship. We had been given little booklets with short French phrases in them and also how to pronounce the French words.

Some of my buddies and I got passes and we rode into town on Army trucks. I was sure disappointed in Marseilles, since it was not typical of what I had read of Paris, for example. The entire town was filthy, as many seaports are. The merchants, as usual, were out to gyp us. We were rather shocked and surprised to hear from some of the French people that this was the American's war and not theirs, since they had lost their war.

We went inside an exclusive department store and tried to buy some stationery. I had quite a time making the clerk understand me. Some women standing nearby could speak English and were having a good laugh at us murdering the French language. My high school French helped us a little and we bought a few grapes, vino, and some wieners.

Most all the theaters were playing American films in English, but with French subtitles. We bought some ice cream and it was as bitter as sour grapes. We visited historic Notre Dame de la Garde and St. Louis and others; took a shower at a quaint old hotel; and returned to our mud camp outside Marseilles.



U.S. printed 'invasion money.'

After spending a week of physical training exercises, rifle inspections, many classes on tactical training, being assigned to help unload equipment from our ship, and, of course, hikes, we received orders one night that this sort of training was at an end.

An amusing thing happened to Bob Hamer and Adam Breuer. They were assigned to help unload the ship and were placed with some French stevedores. While trying to communicate, Adam and Bob were asked where they were from. Adam, of course, was from Chicago and when the Frenchmen heard that, they started imitating machine guns. Hamer was from Iowa and this caused them to imitate pigs. Embarrassing for both our guys.

Our regiment was to move up to the front the next day. I don't believe any of us wanted to hear that news, but we should have known it was coming.

Our regimental motto is "I Am Ready." We sure had trained a long time for this moment. After being briefed for a while and having given the tactical move order to my men, we received more equipment. I did not see how they expected a rifle squad leader to even move with all they had issued to him.

Later on that evening, I happened to walk by one of our recon trucks, which had a powerful Army radio on it. Over the airwaves came some good old American dance music, which was interrupted by a woman's voice. Berlin Sally was at it again. She said that she wanted to welcome the 100th Division to the front lines tomorrow, and that the Germans would try to extend to them a cordial welcome also. In conclusion she stated that she would like to play the general's favorite song. Major General Withers Burress was our commanding general at that time. They had been able to find out about our strategic movements.

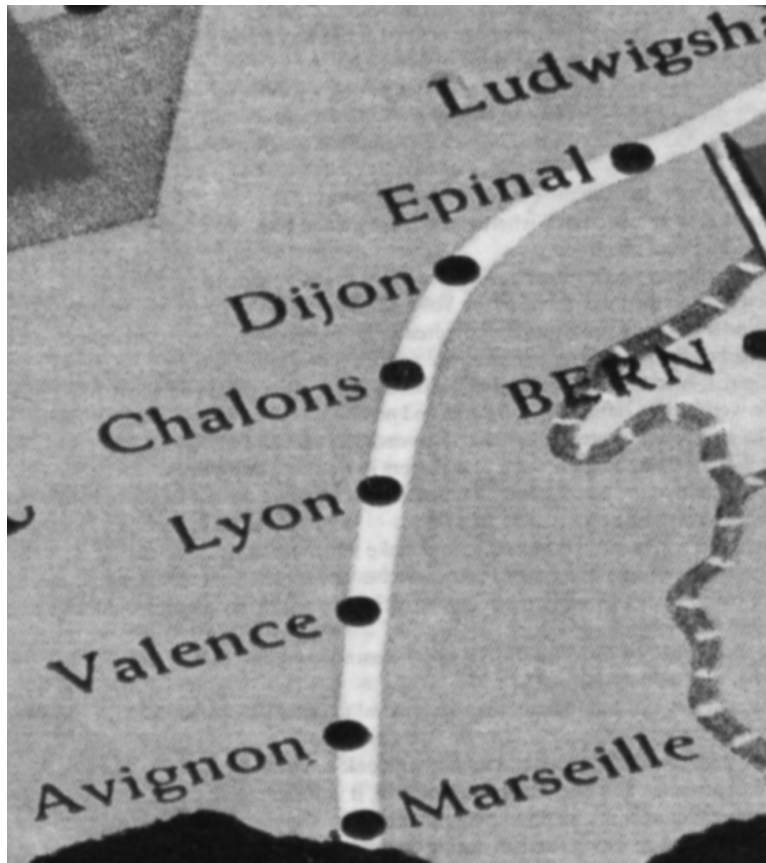
That night, the men of each platoon crowded around the fire they had built to keep warm and there was much talk from everyone about the upcoming trip of the next day.

COMPANY L GOES TO WAR

9

There were occasional rains that kept the area muddy and the morale down. Then we retired for the night. Little did we know about the many nights in our future and how we should have enjoyed what little comfort we had at that time.

The first night was spent more or less on the side of a trail in the forest. We were afraid to unroll our packs that had a blanket in it for fear of having to pull out at any moment. The chilly night air brought out the gas mask covers. It at least cut off a little of the cold wind.



That night only the hard sleepers got more than a wink at a time. During the night, one of my men heard a sound in the bushes. Being green and trigger happy, he whirled around and fired several shots. There was silence and uneasiness. The night passed and dawn came. The surprised man that had fired several shots during the night found to his amazement, a dead cow that he had killed. We pulled out of there early in the morning and walked slowly north until we ran into a line of foxholes. It was the 45th Division, veterans of campaigns in Sicily, Anzio, and the Riviera. "What is this?" they asked as we came forward. They were making fun of us with all of our equipment, full field packs, ammo packs, gas masks, and bayonets. All any of them had was a rifle, bandoliers, and a raincoat. They scared us half to death, telling of the enemy and probably exaggerating most of the tales. After zeroing us in for quite a while, the Thunderbird vets picked up their rifles and moved out, leaving us the big task of pushing the Jerries back in the same fashion that the seasoned troops, now in the rear, had done.

We laid our gas masks and packs aside and they were collected and sent to the rear. We tried to improve the old positions as much as possible just like the textbooks of Fort Benning said. Later on, after being served a hot meal, we received orders to pull out. We moved about a half-mile to a better terrain feature. It was late in the evening when we arrived at the very thickly wooded area on the forward slope of a large hill. I never will forget the first dead German that I got to see up close. It was a sickening sight, and gave me a queer feeling. As soon as we were given sectors, we dug in, as it was just about dark.

I received word from the platoon runner to report to the platoon CP, (command post) where the lieutenant and platoon sergeant were quartered. Our regiment was now sandwiched between the 45th and 3rd Divisions in the thick forest of the Vosges foothills with the remainder of

COMPANY L GOES TO WAR

11

the division several hundred miles to the rear. I was briefed to lead a reconnaissance patrol about a mile from where, it was understood, the 3rd Division's troops were dug in adjacent to us. We were on the left flank of the area and no one was to our immediate left flank. It was not exactly known where the 3rd Division was. At that time you could not see your fingers in front of your face. I thought that the patrol going in this darkness was suicide, but I gave the order to my men anyway.

I selected five men in addition to myself to undertake this mission. We started out stumbling over bushes, ditches, and traveled about 400 yards. Realizing that we could not possibly reach our objective and that a day patrol would have to be undertaken, we returned. I reported the conditions to the CP and the patrol was canceled. What a relief that was. The next day the 2nd Platoon sent out a patrol to establish contact with the 3rd Division. That night proved one thing to me; if you look at a certain object, such as a tree stump, long enough, it will seem to move. Some of my men were very nervous and trigger happy with shots being fired all during the night. We discovered that moving objects that night were, in fact, very real tree trunks.

In the distance could be seen the lofty peaks of the Vosges Mountains.



The woods at St. Remy are thick